STRATEGY : COST : MORAL CHANGES

# WAR REVIEW SECTION
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# THE FOURTH YEAR ON THE BATTLEFIELD

## America Has Come at Last and Long and Bitter Period Is Having a Glorious Ending

### By FRANK H. SIMONDS
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The fourth year of the World War for the Western nations, the gloomiest of the whole struggle, is ending under conditions which are more favorable and give more real cause for optimism than any that have existed in the past twelve months. We are entering the fifth year of the contest not with any prospect of peace now or even within the period of another year, but under circumstances strikingly recalling the situation after the First Battle of the Marne. The second, and we may believe the final, blow of Germany has been parried, if not broken. If we have not brought the new Napoleonic edifice to the ruin of a Waterloo, there are signs that the recent defeat may prove in some degree suggestive of Leipsic.

The story of the fourth year of the struggle is measured by two major events: the collapse of Russia and the coming of the United States. When the year opened we were, all of us, still hoping against hope that the Russian operations in Galicia might prove the first sign of a renaissance of Russian military power, and that a Russian republic might repeat the achievement of the first French Republic and, in defending the liberty of the Slav world, contribute mightily to the salvation of Western civilization.

But before the campaign had come to an end Russia had ceased to be a military factor; treason and madness had done their work and henceforth the disintegration within was to be rapid; while German troops, released from the East, were to carry peril to the very edge of Paris and threaten Sir Douglas Haig's mighty force with the fate which had been prescribed for the "contemptible little army" of Field Marshal Sir John French in the opening days of the war.

The world, particularly the Allied world, was slow in perceiving what were to be the consequences of the Russian collapse. When the full German storm broke, in March of the present year, it took the Allies by surprise and brought an unready coalition within measurable distance of one of the great disasters of human history. But when the March blow had fallen and the extent of the danger was perceived, then the war became a race between America and Germany, a race between our young troops, hurried across a submarine infested ocean, and the last flower of German veterans thrown upon the Allied lines in offensive after offensive, seeking a decision before America came.

As early as June of 1917, when Nivelle's Aisne offensive failed, it became clear that unless America came to the rescue the war would be lost to our allies and Germany would win on the Continent something recalling Napoleon's success against Austria in 1805, Prussia in 1806 and against Russia in 1807. But what was not perceived at that time was that it was going to be a narrow question whether France, Britain and Italy could hold against our coming, and, blind to the real facts, our allies continued to ask of us material and money rather than men, until the bitter awakening of March transformed the whole situation.

The Russian Revolution and the resulting anarchy, which led to the demoralization of the Russian army, in fact produced a situation in which France and Britain could not win the war; it produced a condition in which the possibility of a German success was patent, at least to Germans and neutrals. It brought back the old problem of 1914, and in the next twelve months there was to be repeated the German effort of the Marne campaign. From August, 1917, onward the German problem and the German hope was to organize a new blow which should crush France and Britain before America could arrive, as Germany sought to crush them in 1914 before Russian operations in the East should demand attention.

In a word, we went back suddenly to the conditions of the opening days of the war. By the end of last year Germany was free to strike for Paris again. Before the campaign of 1918 was well opened the peace of Brest-Litovsk and of Bucharest had eliminated Russia and Rumania, abolished the Eastern front, given to the Germans the mastery of the Baltic and Black seas, placed the Kaiser's generals in control of the colossal Russian carcass and removed from the Eastern flank of a completed Mitteleuropa the immediate and apparently even an eventual menace of Slavdom. The Teuton seemed to have won his age-long battle with the Slavs; his way to the Pacific lay open; while he still commanded the Constantinople bridge to the nearer East.

When the campaign of 1917 was over the German could calculate and did calculate that he had, with hands free and resources concentrated upon the Western front, another chance to win the war in the largest possible sense, to dispose of France and Britain before America was ready, and then to negotiate a favorable peace with the American foe.

The story of the campaign of 1917, after August 1, is briefly told. For our allies it is a history replete with misfortune. In August and September the brilliant but foredoomed Brusiloff offensive in Galicia faded into the shameful and indescribable flight of Russian troops from the field of victory into the darkness of demoralization and disintegration. There was a moment when it seemed as if Lemberg was again in danger; we read the old names of towns and rivers, the scenes of victories by the Russians in 1914; but in a few brief hours the Russian offensive in Galicia succumbed to the internal diseases of the Russian nation. After August, in point of fact, Russia was gone.

Meantime, in the west the British offensive in Flanders pursued its unlucky road to complete failure. It had been the conception of Haig and Robertson, striking north from Ypres and out of the famous old salient, to break the German line, cut off the troops on the Belgian seacoast or compel their retreat, free Ostend and Zeebrugge, abolish the submarine bases on this coast and, pressing eastward, throw the Germans behind the Scheldt and compel their later retirement out of France from the Lys to the Meuse.

### Costly British Failure

In this effort Plumer had made a brilliant beginning in June at Messines. But in July and August Gough, later to disappear as a result of the Picardy defeat of the present year, had so handled affairs that a second operation had ended in costly failure, and when Plumer resumed the direction of operations the weather was already changing and the golden moment had passed. In point of fact, the campaign of the British was already sure to fail, for German troops were hastening westward from Russia. Yet, doggedly and grimly, the British generals held their men to their task and the toll of casualties for the British in Flanders rivalled if it did not pass that of the Somme the previous year, while great hopes, excited by a brief but brilliant success before Cambrai, gave way to a new disappointment when one more opportunity was sacrificed.

On the map there was proof of German retreat. The Ypres salient disappeared, the British troops seized the whole of the Passchendaele Ridge and critics talked of the advance from this vantage ground in the next year to Ghent and to Lille, little dreaming that a few days of battle would then suffice to compel the surrender of these hills, won by so much sacrifice and effort, and that Ypres itself was again to be in peril, in peril as deadly as that of October, 1914.

In this autumn the French army was passing through a period of reorganization and renaissance. Its defeat in May had shaken it to the very foundation. For a few brief weeks its morale was lower than at any time since the war began. To Pétain, who succeeded Nivelle, was assigned the grim task of restoring confidence and discipline, while behind the army the nation, under Clemenceau, cleaned its high places of those who had conspired against victory and held secret conference with the foe. A few minor successes above the Aisne and about Verdun served to prove that the task was being accomplished, but for the balance of the campaign of 1917 the French army was limited to the defensive, or to operations which were but local offensives.

The first months of the fourth year of war saw Italy winning considerable successes along the Isonzo, where for two years Italian soldiers had been struggling to break through the gigantic Thermopylæ between the Julian Alps and the Adriatic, by which ran the road to Trieste and the Austrian capital far beyond; the road Napoleon had taken more than a century before in his brilliant campaign of 1787. By October the gate seemed forced. Austrian recoil was general north and south, and Allied capitals, looking southward, saw in Italian success at least consolation for their own failures.

But in November Italy suffered her first great reverse of the war. Her population and her army, like those of the French nation, had been corrupted by enemy propaganda and by defeatist and pacifist efforts. The taint of Bolshevism was already beginning to do its work in Italy as it had in Russia. Suddenly, along the Upper Isonzo front, out of the mountains about Caporetto, a German army appeared and struck an Italian army holding the flank of Cadorna's main forces to the southward, and holding it carelessly and with little thought of danger.

In a few short hours this Italian army was destroyed in exactly the fashion Radko Dimitrieff's army had been destroyed at the Dunajec, and with consequences to other armies equally grievous.

Thanks to an Italian rally and to the rush of British and French troops to their stricken ally, Venice was saved, and the retreat ended at the Piave and not at the Adige; but Italy had suffered one of the great defeats of history and was henceforth condemned for long months to the defensive. She had, in fact, been on the edge of ruin; her escape had been by a slight margin, and at the moment the question of her future capacity to fight, brilliantly answered at the Piave the other day, was to give her allies grave concern.

Thus the calendar year and the campaign of 1917 ended amid the most gloomy of all possible circumstances. British successes in the early months had been dimmed by the failure, the bloody failure, in Flanders. The French army had not merely seen its hopes come to nothing at the Aisne, but had, for the first time, been shaken in its confidence and was only beginning to give signs of renewed constancy and efficiency. The Italian army had suffered one of the great disasters of the war. The minor efforts in the Balkans had been without even the smallest material benefit.

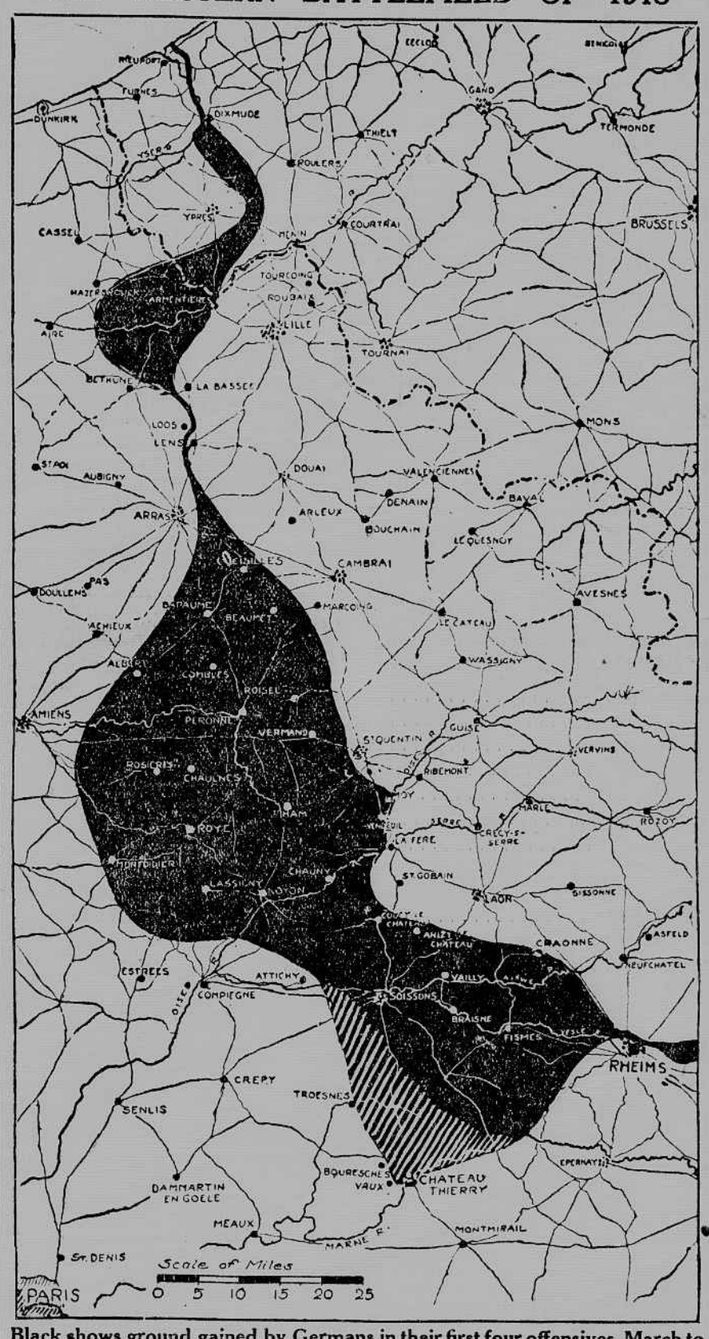
German strategy for the campaign of 1918 has already been fairly clearly revealed upon the battlefield. The German had some forty-odd divisions more than his opponents, exclusive of the Americans. He had an interior position, a unified command and a homogeneous army. He had devised a new system of attack, which included the element of surprise and the use of gas to paralyze the rearward communications of his foes; he had a new small and mobile gun, which made rapid support of swiftly moving infantry waves possible, and he had generals who were trained in Eastern warfare and not hypnotized by the long period of positional warfare in the West.

Using all of his advantages the German seems to have decided upon the following course: At the outset of the campaign he planned to throw an enormous force, a host as great as he had employed at the Marne, against fifty miles of the British front between the Oise and the Scarpe, crushing the army which buckled the British to the French front and opening a gap between the British and French armies. Thereafter he purposed to throw the British back upon the Channel and the French in upon Paris and, holding the one with relatively small forces, containing him behind the Somme or the Oise, settle with the other.

In this conception it is still open to debate whether the German intended to strike his second blow against the British or the French, to seek Paris or the Channel ports, although I think recent events have proved that his intention was to contain the British and destroy the French. But in any event this was the course he chose when the British had been not exactly contained, not in the least separated from their French allies, but subjected to the severest defeat in British military history and brought within sight of ruin.

On March 21 the German struck between the Scarpe and the Oise, forty divisions against fifteen, swiftly destroyed the Fifth British Army, swept over its ruins to the outskirts of Amiens, opened the road down the Oise Valley to Paris as far as Noyon and took Montdidier, and cut the main railroad from Paris to Amiens by artillery fire. Only the swiftest possible work on the part of the French rushing to the aid of their British allies prevented the separation of the two armies. The blow was checked at the moment when further German progress would have meant separation and separation approximate ruin.

### THE WESTERN BATTLEFIELD OF 1918




**Black shows ground gained by Germans in their first four offensives, March to June. White lines on black show ground lost by Germans in recent fighting.**

Rarely has any defeat taken the vanquished more completely by surprise. Suddenly the French and British alike were aroused to the fact that their position was critical, their numbers insufficient and bound to be insufficient. They had expected to maintain a successful defensive until America deliberately accomplished her military programme. They saw themselves condemned to a desperate defensive, while America feverishly rushed to France those divisions without which a Ludendorff victory seemed inevitable. By April 1, 1918, the Allied nations at last knew the extent of their peril and recognized also that at least four months must pass before their safety could be assured.

By his first attack Ludendorff, for his had become the master mind in the German High Command, employing the method of a brilliant lieutenant, Hutier, had succeeded where all predecessors had failed. He had pierced and broken an enemy front on an extent of fifty miles and to a depth of thirty-five. After three years and a half of a war of positions, of stagnation, of siege and trenches, he had carried an offensive into open country beyond all defence zones. For the moment, at least, it seemed as if the conditions of warfare of the Marne time were to be restored and struggle in trenches was at an end.

Checked in Picardy, Ludendorff carried his offensive to Flanders and again achieved swift and substantial victory

Breaking the Allied line south of Ypres he pushed forward fifteen miles toward the Channel ports, won back all the lost ground of the Passchendaele campaign of the previous year, took Kemmel, which looks down upon the rear of Ypres, and threatened to reduce this restored salient, which had for the British Empire the same significance Verdun carried for the French nation. This greater success was not attained, and a sharp repulse on April 29 closed the Flanders battle; but this second episode had served to demonstrate anew the efficacy of German tactics and the advantage of German numbers and interior position. It reopened the question of the arrival of the Kaiser at Calais and emphasized again the greatness of Allied peril.

Already American troops were beginning to cross the seas in great numbers; Foch had succeeded to supreme command; France and Britain were repairing previous errors; but henceforth, as he awaited the coming of the Americans to save a new Waterloo, Foch was bound to recall frequently the words of Wellington, the impatient longing for "night or Blücher."

The third German blow was in the larger sense even more terrifying than the first. Although two months had passed and the Allies had been allowed time to study the German method and prepare an answer, Ludendorff was able in late May to duplicate his March successes, and, sweeping across the Aisne and the Vesle, the victorious German troops reached the bank of the Marne once more, after nearly three years of absence. Nor was this all. The British positions in Picardy had lacked any dominating military strength, but the French positions at the Aisne were among the finest on the Western front.

It may be that this German success, which took the Kaiser to the Marne, will prove the high-water mark of the present campaign; it may be that when the German troops returned to the Marne they were the vanguards of the ultimate advance of the Germans in the war. It is too early to prophesy, but in any event when the June fighting was over Paris was plainly menaced, Allied fortunes were in a desperate state, German victory, so far as the European phase was concerned, seemed no longer impossible. At best the possibility of the loss of Paris and of a retirement to the south had to be considered.

But before June was over the tide had changed. Seeking to sweep the French out of the Compiègne region, open up the lower valley of the Aisne, insure the continuity of the right wing of his operative front between Soissons and Montdidier by clearing the French out of strong ground and carrying their line into the open ground south of Senlis, Ludendorff launched a fourth blow between Montdidier and Noyon, between the Avre and the Oise. This time there was no surprise, no collapse; the German machine ground its way forward for a short distance, cleared the Lassigny heights and some valuable ground along the Oise. But by the third day it was checked, and Mangin, the deliverer of Verdun, was striking a counter blow on the German flank, which paralyzed the offensive. Compiègne was not taken; at a staggering cost the German had gained a little ground, but his fourth venture had been a failure.

While Ludendorff prepared for the fifth stroke his Austrian colleague, Borevic, struck on the Piave and sought by a supreme stroke, with the largest and finest Austrian army which had yet appeared in Italy under his command, to crush the troops who had been beaten so terribly at the Isonzo six months before. But the Austrian offensive failed dismally, a brief advance, a short desperate period of days when Italian counter attacks held up the advance, then floods and new Italian attacks, and the Austrians were driven in disorder across the Piave, losing a quarter of a million of men, innumerable guns and having suffered in a few brief days a defeat as destructive to their plans for this year as Verdun had proved for the Germans in 1916.

And now, last of all, checked on the Oise and at the Compiègne salient, we have seen Ludendorff in recent days launch his fifth offensive, a colossal attack from the Marne to the Argonne, later restricted to a local operation to break in the Rheims salient and clear his flank and rear against the day when he should resume his drive for Paris.

## Failure Came to Each of Allies in Year



The results of this venture are being written on the map at the present hour. Its failure was immediate and save in one sector complete. Its failure in all sectors was complete when Foch launched his ever memorable counter attack, in which for the first time American troops in large numbers played a leading part. America had at last arrived; the despairing call of March had been answered in July, when more than 200,000 American troops participated in the decisive thrust and American troops in France numbered above 1,200,000.

Sieyès once said, when asked to give an account of his adventures during the time of the Terror, "I lived." Foch might make similar answer, looking back over the difficult and critical days from March 21 to July 19. But by this latter date he was able to face his foe with comparatively equal numbers and with the assurance that at no distant date and thenceforth throughout the war he would have the decisive advantage.

It seemed, it seems now, as I write these lines on Sunday, July 21, just four months after Ludendorff's first blow in Picardy, that the worst is over, the consequences of the Russian collapse have been liquidated. If we may not yet wisely fix the time when victory will in the larger sense be won we have come to the hour when the danger of defeat is passing, probably has passed.

### America Has Come

The German problem in 1918 was his problem in 1914. Four years ago British unreadiness and Russian slowness in mobilization gave him six weeks in which to dispose of France, employing the full weight of his military establishment against France. He used the six weeks, he won many battles and drew near to Paris; but the close of the period saw him in retreat, his time exhausted, his blow parried; the Russian menace in the East, no longer to be neglected entirely, destined to make ever-growing demands upon him until he was forced to go East and seek what he found—victory and the destruction of Russia.

In March, 1918, the Kaiser's new commander could count not upon six weeks but on something like six months in which to bring home the victory. Russia's collapse gave him back the advantages of the first weeks of the war. But again he had to win in the time fixed, for by the end of six months America's aid would begin to become effective and if he failed in the campaign of 1918 to put one of his great foes out he would automatically lose the initiative, the offensive, the chance for victory in the next campaign, when the American hosts had arrived.

And now, in late July, we see German armies again retiring from the Marne after a severe defeat the extent of which is still unrevealed. No disaster may come now, as none came in 1914. The German may presently gather up his strength and strike against the British, as he struck in October, 1914. Defeated at the Marne, he may, for a second time, seek compensation in a new effort to open the road to Calais. But the road to Calais ends at the Channel, and it was not by taking Calais but by beating down French or British armies, one at least, both if possible, that the Kaiser in his grandiose campaign of the present year was to achieve a victorious peace.

It seems to me, then, that the fourth anniversary of the outbreak of the war will see the substantial failure of the German's campaign of 1918. He has used up the time and the resources he derived from the Russian collapse and he has won only territory, booty and prisoners; early successes have been followed by at least one smashing defeat. America, like Blücher, has come. And so a long and bitter year is having a glorious ending.